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## ABSTRACT

The rejection of the "Great Forces" and "Great Man". theories of newspaper history allows a middle-range view that seeks to discover the uniqueness of the newspaper business and to explain how that uniqueness shaped the business values of the editors and proprietors. An examination of three Chicago, Illinois, newspapers--the "Tribune," the "Times," and the "Daily News'--during the 1877 railroad strike, the 1886 eight-hour day controversy, and the 1894 Pullman strike and boycott reveals that in spite of sharply opposing views on business-labor relations, these papers tended to exhibit similar fundamental business values -- a commitment to public interest consumerism, an obsession with commercial order and social , control, and a growing faith in organizational/bureaucratic modes of conflict resolution. The unique nature of the newspaper as it evolved in the nineteenth century explains these positions. As public institutions that saw themselves as custodians of the public interest, newspapers abhorred conflict and were committed to peace and order at all costs. Their faith in arbitration reflects journalism's faith in the efficacy of information gathering, application, and analysis. These values were essentially those of the progressive movement and point to the continuing values of contemporary journalism. (JL)

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## THE BUSINESS VALUES OF AMERICAN NEWSPAPERS:

The Nineteenth-Century Watershed

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## THE BUSINESS VALUES OF AMERICAN NEWSPAPERS:

The Nineteenth-Century Watershed

The business history of American newspapers has been rather simply told by journalism historians. There are two versions of the story. The first is the Great Forces version; the second is the Great Man version. The Great Forces version is almost pure functionalism, even economic determinism. Newspapers are portrayed as products of the mass media marketplace — that is, they are pulled into existence by the tug of demand. As times changed, new audiences or new advertisers produced new newspapers. Newspapers were business enterprises, and they naturally shared the business values of other businesses of their time. The Great Man version, on the other hand, is almost pure biography. Newspapers are portrayed as the tools, for good or ill, of powerful press lords. They are forced into existence by eccentric geniuses. In this version of the story, newspapers embody the business values of their proprietors, which may or may not reflect the values of the business community at large.

These two versions of the business history of American newspapers need not be contradictory. In fact, journalism histories frequently tell both stories. In Emery and Emery's The Press and America, for example, Joseph Pulitzer is both the product and the builder of his era, and the New York World is both the result of market forces and of individual genius. Of course, both of these things could have been true and probably were. But though not logically in-

consistent, such bifurcated theorizing can lead to mushy explanation. The problem is not that the approach is untrue to life but that it is too true. It is all encompassing; it explains everything . . . and thus nothing. The uniqueness of the newspaper business is lost in this bifurcated approach, because every possible behavior of every possible kind of business could be explained by one or the other version of this business history story. Taken together, these two versions are polar extremes of the whole continuum of business history in general and in all its bewildering complexity. To adopt this bifurcated story is to say that newspaper business history is simply business history — and little more.

This paper argues for a middle range view of newspaper business history that seeks to discover the uniqueness of the newspaper business and to explain how that uniqueness shaped the business values of editors and proprietors. It suggests that newspapers are peculiar sorts of businesses, and that because of their peculiarity they are not shaped by Great Forces in precisely the same ways as other businesses. In both product and structure, newspapers are a special form of business enterprise, and as such they reflect a special set of business values. On the other hand, if newspapers are not the determinate products of Great Forces, neither are they the mere playthings of Great Men. As a group, newspapers have been interestingly similar in their underlying business values, regardless of the men at the editorial or managerial helms. Again, both the nature of the product and the structure of the business are key. The characteristics peculiar to the business of newspapering are more important, more theoretically interesting than either the Great Forces or the Great Men of conventional journalism history.

Specifically, this paper will discuss the besiness values of Chicago newspapers during the formative years of the modern commercial press, the late nineteenth century. The paper will explore the reactions of three leading Chicago newspapers to three great business-labor crises: the 1877 railroad strikes, the 1886 eight-hour-day movement and Haymarket affair, and the 1894 Pullman strike and boycott. The thesis of the paper is that despite ideological and idiosyncratic differences the newspapers were curiously similar in their basic values, that this similarity was related to the peculiar nature of the newspaper business, and that these values were proto-progressive in several interesting ways. By proto-progressive I mean that newspapers seem to have been early proponents of progressive-era business values, notably a commitment to public interest consumerism, an obsession with commercial order and social control, and a growing faith in organizational/bureaucratic modes of conflict resolution.

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The nineteenth century was the age of laissez-faire in American business — or at least in American business values. Daniel Webster had set the stage in 1824. "Our age is wholly of a different character," he wrote, "and its legislation takes another turn. Society is full of excitement; competition comes in place of monopoly; and intelligence and industry ask only for fair play and an open field." Private enterprise was to take the place of social action and community tradition, the fading legacies of seventeenth-century religion and mercantilism. The American ideology of laissez-faire was the residue of eighteenth-century liberalism, refined in the economic, thought of Adam Smith and David Ricardo, and rejevenated in the late nineteenth century by the social Darwinism of Herbert Spencer and William Graham Sumner. Ironically, laissez-faire as an ideology fastened its grip most tightly on the public mind in the late nineteenth century, when the rise of corporate capitalism had begun to make it obsolete as an accurate description of social reality or guide to public policy.

The foundation of laissez-faire was private property, and the growth of laissez-faire in the nineteenth century was essentially an elaboration of traditional American notions of the rights and prerogatives of property. Since colonial times, Americans had associated property ownership with personal independence — or, in the terminology of the time, liberty. The right to property was a fundamental right, a natural right. Classical economic theory turned this personal right into a social virtue. Private ownership of property and its management by independent, self-interested proprietors would produce the most socially beneficial use of property through the magic of the market-place. The nature of property ownership had changed radically by the late nineteenth century, with large amounts of property in the hards of a few corporations and large numbers of hands with little or no propenty at all. But the ideology of private property remained vibrant in law and in public sentiment, especially the sentiment of businessmen.

The role of government in the laissez-faire system, of course, was to police the stage, not to play a major role in the drama. Or so held the ideology. In some ways, this was the case in the late nineteenth century. Businessmen and business corporations dominated public life. The federal bureaucracy was a fraction of the size of, say, the railroad industry by the 1890s. Direct government intervention in economic life was still a small-scale affair compared to what it would later become. But the government was hardly inactive or neutral. Often governments -- local, tate, national -- directly promoted business enterprise. More than anything else, however, the role of government at all levels in America in the nineteenth century was merely to affirm and legitimate emerging property relations -- that is, those property relations generated by private power and by the marketplace. Most importantly this was the function of courts, which ingeniously justified the growth of corporations and large-scale finance capitalism in terms of individual private property rights.

Conventional business views on labor and labor organization in the age of laissez-faire were also linked to conceptions of private property. On the one hand, the right to was viewed as a property right and the selling of one's labor as a property transaction. This made labor — a job — an individual—level contract arrangement between the employer and a single employee. Labor unions, especially if they used any sort of forced compliance, were widely denounced as infringements upon the individual's fundamental right to control his own labor, his own property. Furthermore, businessmen frequently argued that strikes or other concerted job actions infringed upon their property rights. Strikes were more than men merely quitting their jobs; they were conspiracies in restraint of trade. The courts in the late nineteenth century, under the growing dominence of laissez-faire philosophy of the business community, gradually elaborated these property-based theories of organized labor.

On the eve of the great business-labor upheavals of 1877-1894, the Chicago newspapers generally shared the business values of the age of laissez-faire — but not entirely and not in altogether similar ways. The city's two dominant morning dailies, the <u>Times</u> and the <u>Tribune</u>, were quite conventional in their devotion to individualism, private property, free enterprise, limited government, and the efficacy and sanctity of the marketplace. These were self-conscious champions of the business culture of the city. The leading afternoon daily by 1877 was the upstart <u>Daily News</u>, founded less than two years before as the city's first "penny paper." From the beginning, the <u>Daily News</u> was much less committed to laissez-faire than its venerable contemporaries. In the maelstrom of the modern city, the <u>Daily News</u> saw the need for a softening of the discipline of the marketplace in social relations. As a paper for the lower classes, the <u>Daily News</u> was the champion of social rights that moved beyond very rigidly defined rights of private property. Yet despite clear differences in editorial philosophy, these papers shared some fundamental business and



social values during the two decades after 1876 -- values somewhat at variance from the conventional values of the larger business community. The nature of the newspaper business itself helped to shape their common perspective.

When the great railroad strikes of 1877 began to spread west toward Chicago, no one had to guess which side the Chicago Times would be on. The Times was the personal organ of Wilbur F. Storey, a self-made millionaire who believed steadfastly in the virtues of independence and hard work and in the absolute sanctity of private property. 8 The Times, however, was more famous for its sensationalism than its laissez-faire economic theory. Storey was notorious in Chicago in the 1860s and '70s for what his long-time assistant Franc Wilkie called the Times's "glaring indecency . . . which reeked, seethed like a hell's broth in the Times cauldrons and made a stench in the nostrils of decent people." Despite its sensationalism, however, and despite Storey's exclusion from Chicago's polite society, the paper was unfailingly loyal to the business culture and to the ideology of laissez-faire. The Times was especially devoted to the morality and the efficiency of free markets and private enterprise. In scores of editorials in the mid-1870s, Storey praised the "laws of political economy" and railed against government "paternalism," an all-purpose Times label for any effort, by the government to tinker with the finely tuned mechanisms of the marketplace. 10

Storey loved the great national railroads, and he blasted the "thugs and lawless mobs" that began to shut them down in July of 1877. Even before the labor troubles turned violent, the <u>Times</u> denounced the whole idea of trade unionism and strikes as lunatic assaults on the private property of the railroad companies. "The notion upon which all strikers act," the paper declared, "is that they have a right of employment upon other men's property. . . They assume to establish conditions upon which they will permit other men to use and manage their own property. Nothing could be more unreasonable." For the

Times, men would be paid what they were worth, according to the laws of God and economics. "No human contrivance can ever alter the principle that underlies the relation of labor to capital, even as no statute can medify the motions of the planets or control the ocean tides." Once the strikers became unruly and property was damaged, the <u>Times</u> raged, with headlines such as "Riot's Rule," "Terror's Reign," and "A Mob's Madness." In editorials the paper now called for the complete suppression of the strikers by any means necessary, including the use of federal troops. "Stamp out the Mob," the <u>Times</u> thundered. The time for shooting had come. 14

Even more than the <u>Times</u>, the <u>Chicago Tribune</u> was self-consciously "the business-men's newspaper." "It is patronized by all those who are in trade and commerce, banking, insurance, navigation, common-carrying, producing and distributing wealth," the paper boasted during a circulation dispute with the <u>Times</u> in 1876. Besides puffing its own "respectable" circulation, the <u>Tribune</u> scoffed at the <u>Times</u>'s apparent efforts to entice readers from the "slums and back alleys" of Chicago with its <u>Police Gazette</u> approach to journalism. The <u>Tribune</u> was the handwork of Joseph Medill, a prominent member of the Republican political and business elite of Chicago. As a political party leader and former mayor, Medill harbored less suspicion than Storey and the <u>Times</u> of government per se. But Medill was nearly as faithful as his rival to the ideology of laissez-faire. The <u>Tribune</u> believed in private property and free enterprise.

The <u>Tribune</u> admitted more of a role for government than the <u>Times</u> did, but that role must still be strictly limited. The end of government, the <u>Tribune</u> argued, was the protection of property and the preservation of individualism. 17

The <u>Tribune</u>'s devotion to individualism led the paper to oppose labor unionism in general and the 1877 railroad strikes in particular. In its first editorial on the strikes, the <u>Tribune</u>, in its usual pedantic fashion, lectured the strikers on labor economics. Wages were not set by the employers but by the

market, and the employee held no lien on the property of the employer. "If these men think that they can't take the wages offered them," the paper said, "they can step out and let others take their places who feel that they can live upon the wages." Employers would have gladly paid more, but they could not. "The decline of wages has been the outgrowth of hard times and stern necessity." Like the Times, the Tribune became highly agitated when violence broke out. The news columns were now filled with sensational accounts of "Bloodshed," "Red war," and "Civil War." The Tribune declared that "Mob Violence Must Cease" and law and order must prevail. The whole force of local, state, and national government must be brought to bear. And the orders must be "shoot to kill" — for "a bullet in time saves nine."

The Chicago Daily News was a different sort of paper from its morning contemporaries. The Daily News was a new comer to Chicago, a small, cheap paper, designed for the middle and lower classes; and it was already a remarkable success by the summer of 1877. The Daily News was founded by Melville E. Stone, a self-made man not unlike Storey and Medill. In his life and in his newspaper, Stone celebrated the homely virtues of his childhood on the Illinois frontier -- family, honesty, hard work, conscience, equality. 22 Despite his basic commitment to the business culture, however, Stone guided his newspaper down a somewhat different ideological path. From the beginning, the Daily News was much more attuned to the idea of interdependence than to the notion of individualism in the great cities of the late nineteenth century. 23 Unlike the Times and the Tribune, the Daily News promoted public works jobs for the unemployed, economic regulation, and other government intervention and enterprise, including the nationalization of American railroads. 24 In short, the Daily News embraced the rudiments of a social understanding of property that was at odds with conventional doctrines of laissez-faire.

In the 1877 railroad strikes, the <u>Daily News</u> sympathized with the striking

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workers and, for awhile at least, championed their cause in Chicago. Far from preaching at the workers about the immutable law of wages; the <u>Daily News</u> denounced the railroads for their "infamous treatment" of their employees and excused the men for replying to this treatment with the only weapon they had; a strike. The <u>Daily News</u> blamed the railroads for the strike and hoped that these corporations would be taught by this crisis to pay their workers adequately. But the question could not ultimately be settled, the paper declared, "until the rights of workmen are properly acknowledged." As violence spread to.

Chicago, the <u>Daily News</u> lost some of its sympathy) Like the other Chicago newspapers it carried scare headlines ("Pandemonium," "The Grave Outlook") and condemned rioting in strong language. After the strike had ended, the <u>Daily News</u> denounced the <u>Times</u> and the <u>Tribune</u> for their bloodthirsty calls to arms, but during the heat of confrontation the <u>Daily News</u>, like its more reckless competitors, also had called for the swift suppression of the mob, through the use of deadly force if necessary.

In some ways, then, these three papers were quite different in their ideolopies and sympathies during the 1877 strikes. The <u>Times</u> and the <u>Tribune</u> were fairly similar in their anti-union stance and their commitment to laissez-faire; the <u>Daily News</u> was pro-striker and had begun in general to move, though hesitantly, more toward a philosophy of activist government and social welfare.

In spite of these differences, however, the editorial ruminations in these three newspapers during the 1877 strikes suggest some basic shared values, and these shared values in turn suggest some interesting insights into the nature of the newspaper business.

The most obvious shared value was the obsession of all three mewspapers with the public's role in the strikes. Public opinion, public interest, public reaction -- all these were key terms of the controversy. Notwithstanding their devotion to private property, none of the three editors doubted for a minute

that the issue was heavily clothed in the public interest. The newspapers insisted, as the <u>Maily News</u> put it, that "the whole question of railroads is a great public one." The <u>Daily News</u> reminded its readers that the Supreme Court had declared railroads "quasi-public property." The <u>Tribune</u> spoke of railroads as "public corporations within the control of legislation." Even the <u>Times</u>, the most doctrinaire laissez-faire enthusiast of the three, declared that "railroad managers must be made to understand distinctly that they as well as other men owe duties to the public -- duties which the public cannot safely permit them to evade."

All three papers defined the public interest in the 1877 strikes as a kind of consumers' right. They professed to speak for a community of consumers of railroad services, whose interests superceded those of the principal participants in the conflict. All three newspapers suggested that the strikers had early captured the sympathy of the public, but they lost this sympathy as they precipitated what the <u>Times</u> called a "strike against society itself." To a large extent, the <u>Times</u> and the <u>Tribune</u> worried about lost business in industries affected by the stoppage of rail transport. But all three papers portrayed their concern as embracing the whole community, the final consumers of food stuffs and merchandise. The <u>Tribune</u> described how food was already scarce by the end of July and high priced — and public sympathy for the strike was rapidly in decline. Though they often differed on what public opinion was and what it ought to be, all three papers took the idea of public opinion and public interest quite seriously.

A second basic value shared by the <u>Times</u>, the <u>Tribune</u>, and the <u>Daily News</u> in 1877 was an absolutely rigid commitment to commercial peace, order, and social control. Once the strike became disorderly, all three papers set aside all arguments about the issues at stake and proclaimed that peace must be paramount and must be imposed at all costs. Each of the papers at one point or another declared



that there were two sides to the question of wages. But the question was irrelevant in the face of violence. "The first and most important duty is to quell mob rule," the <u>Tribune</u> said, "to stop violence, pillage, and incendiarism at all hazards, and to restore law and order." The other papers agreed completely. All supported the use of federal troops to suppress the mobs; all urged violence against violence in the name of peace. The <u>Times</u> put it most bluntly: "The killing of some of the insurgents is not a matter which concerns society at all. If they stand in the way of society's peaceful order, the sooner they are killed the better." Even the <u>Daily News</u>, the strikers' best newspaper friend in Chicago, praised the heavy-handed force of the police and militia. All agreed on law and order at all costs.

A corollary to the papers' commitment to social order was their belief that most segments of society — including the strikers in fact — were orderly.

All the papers believed in a broad community of interest between labor and capital, with stress on the idea of community. There may have been some friction in the industrial world, but the papers believed there was more basis for peaceful consensus than conflict. The papers believed the papers portrayed the rioters as outsiders—not railroad workers at all. The papers blamed the violence on roughs and rowdies, tramps and vagabonds, Communist loafers and vagrants, and even blackguard boys and gutter-snipes. The Daily News was appalled by the "thugs, thieves, and hoodlums that the slums are now vomiting into our streets."

These were outsiders, aliens, violators of the natural peaceful equilibrium of the consensus community.

This faith in social order and insistence upon social control was related to a third basic value that emerged in the newspapers' editorial reaction to the 1877 strikes: a pragmatic commitment to an organizational/bureaucratic approach to conflict resolution that flirted with economic regulation. The <u>Times</u>, the <u>Tribune</u>, and the <u>Daily News</u> all recognized that the railroad workers had legiti-



mate grievances against some of the railroad companies. All three papers especially despised Jay Gould, a railroad tycoon whom they all denounced for grossly inept, even wicked management practices. All judged the railroads as guilty of bringing on the strike as the railroad workers. They tended to view the strike as an unfortunate and unnecessary result of bad management — by both corporations and union leadership. They hoped that the turmoil of the strike would have the good result of improving the bureaucratic organization of the industry, to the advantage of both—capital and labor — and the public. 35

Though the Times was hazy on how it expected the good to result, both the Daily News and the Tribune saw the need for some government intervention. urging the strikers to give up the effort, the Daily News assured them that their "demonstration has taught the country a lesson it cannot forget. Relief may not come at once, but it will come. The most important study of American statesmen for the next five years will be the proper adjustment of the relations between capital and labor." The Tribune urged again and again that the proper adjustment should be a national system of arbitration. Both papers believed in negotiation and discussion; they believed in the power of facts and information in the rational settlement of conflict. The Tribune also advocated pensions and disability programs funded jointly by employees and employers. Such bureaucratic arrangements would stabilize the industry and would be good for capital, labor, and the public at large. 36 These papers did not advocate legal regulation of wages or direct government interference in the wage process, Rather they sought recognition in the community for the rights of labor to fair compensation and participation in the industry. They believed in the natural community of capital and labor and they sought to strengthen that community through organizational means -- assisted, modestly, by government.

The Chicago <u>Times</u>, Chicago <u>Tribune</u>, and Chicago <u>Daily News</u> were all still in business and still circulation leaders in their city in 1886, another critical



year in labor and business history in the merica. The so-called "labor problem" had continued to perplex the nation during the decade after 1877, and mid-1880s became, in the words of one classic labor history, "the Great Upheaval." A series of strikes and boycotts and large-scale union organizing efforts in the 1884-86 period came together in the movement for an eight-hour work day, a movement which in turn culminated in nationwide work stoppages on May 1, 1886. In Chicago, the eight-hour movement became mixed up with other issues, including socialist and anarchist political agitation. For Chicagoans and for much of the rest of the country, the eight-hour movement was lost in the smoke of the Haymarket bomb, which exploded, with far-reaching repercussions, the night of May 4, 1886.

The Times, the Tribune, and the Daily News interpreted the eight-hour movement and the Haymarket affair much the same as they had the 1877 railroad strikes. As in 1877, the Times was the most thoroughly laissez-faire in orientation and the most stridently anti-labor in disposition. Though Wilbur Storey had died in 1884, and the paper had begun to decline in popularity, it still maintained Storey's allegiance to individualism and to the rights of private property. During the eight-hour-day strikes the paper denounced the eight-hour idea and damned all labor organizations, especially the Knights of Labor, led by the "despotic" Terrence Powderly. 39 The Tribune was as anti-strike as the Times, but it was not stridently anti-union. The Tribune on several occasions during the heat of crisis in April and May, 1886, praised the wisdom and moderation of Powderly. Though generally opposed on economic principle to the eight-hour idea, the Tribune was not hostile to it in practice if it could be worked out through conciliatory means. The paper certainly admitted the right of the Knights to work toward that goal. Once again, as in 1877, the Daily News was most sympathetic to labor's cause. Though it too opposed coercive strikes and secondary boycotts, the Daily News gave favorable coverage to the eight-hour

movement, including the eight-hour strikes.41

In spite of fundamental ideological and emotional disagreements over the "labor question," the three newspapers again, as in 1877, shared some basic values in their handling of the crisis of 1886. Once again, they all agreed that the labor-business confrontation was a great public question of vital interest to the community at large. The Daily News declared that public optnion would finally settle the question, once all the opposing fact's and information were known and discussed. "Out of all these varying views will come, in time, the fair, unprejudiced, controlling sentiment of general opinion which will set its seal of approval on these perplexing questions. To that decision all interests must in the end yield." All three papers professed concern about the impact of the eight-hour idea on the general business outlook and on the community of consumers. The Tribune, for example, argued that the ramifications of the eight-hour day world extend far beyond immediate employeremployee relations. If adopted in a single city, it could undermine the ability of the whole city to compete with other cities. If adopted generally, it could increase the cost of living for all consumers everywhere. 43 All interests in the dispute had great public duties that they must not ignore.

The newspapers' commitment to social peace and social order was perhaps even more ardent in 1886 than it had been in 1877. After a mob smashed windows at the McCormick Reaper Works and especially after the bomb exploded near the Haymarket, all the newspapers called for retribution, swift and sure. The Haymarket bomb provoked the papers to furious cries for law and order. "The community is menaced by a peril the magnitude of which it were folly to underestimate," the Times exclaimed. The Tribune declared that the whole community must now rise up to stamp out the anarchist menace. Even the Daily News, which was sympathetic to the working class, denounced this apparent assault on public order. "Action -- prompt, vigorous, calm, and devoid of the element of ven-

geance — must be instituted. It is not a struggle between wage-workers and capitalists, but between law-abiding citizens and irreverent desecrators of the most sacred rights of citizenhood. That an assertion of the power and dignity of the law will be made no one has reason to doubt.

Again, as in 1877, the attack on the public peace was seen as coming from outside the legitimate community. For days after Haymarket, the newspapers produced streams of viciously anti-foreign editorials. All agreed that it was the Poles, the Bohemians, the Russians, and other un-Americanized eastern Europeans who caused the trouble, who cause all the trouble in large American cities. All agreed with the Tribune that "Chicago has become the rendezvous for the worst elements of the Socialistic, atheistic, alcoholic European classes."

In the newspapers' view of public order and community, disorder was artificial, imported from sick, dying civilizations. The natural social relations between capital and labor in America were complementary and cordial. As in 1877, the papers reasserted their belief in a class-less society, in which capital and labor recognized their community of interest. The dissidents once again were illegitimate, alien outsiders.

All three papers approved of increased social force against industrial violence, including the use of police, militia, and court injunctions. The Times did not go much beyond this as a means to conflict resolution. It simply urged that the laws be enforced rigidly and impartially, and the natural peace and order of economic life would be restored. The Tribune and the Daily News, on the other hand, as in 1877 elaborated, sometimes vaguely and indirectly, an organizational approach to economic conflict resolution. Both newspapers urged that the eight-hour-day issue be worked out in the "spirit of mutual concession." They viewed the idea as experimental, and both argued for careful deliberation. But both also seemed to agree that the experiment could succeed if conducted on the basis of facts, of hard information, discussion, debate, negotiation, and



compromise. Both supported labor unionism, if the unions eschewed strikes and violence in favor of arbitration. The idea of arbitration still seemed an especially attractive method for settling industrial disputes. If indeed there were no fundamental conflict between capital and labor, as these newspapers believed, arbitration would benefit everyone and hurt no one -- including the general public.

Less than a decade after the Haymarket affair, Chicago found itself the storm center of another major nationwide railroad strike — the so-called Pullman strike. The Pullman strike, in its full-blown form in early July, 1894, was actually a secondary boycott against railroads that used sleeping cars manufactured by the Pullman Palace Car Company of suburban Chicago. The boycott was mounted in support of striking Pullman workers by the year-old American Railway Union (ARU) under the leadership of Eugene V. Debs. Once in effect, the boycott against Pullman cars quickly developed into a general railroad strike, tying up traffic nationwide and leading to the usual clashes between mobs and police, striking and non-striking workers, and to the destruction of railroad property. Throughout the turmoil, George M. Pullman absolutely refused to deal with the ARU or to negotiate with Püllman employees. The strike was broken by federal court injunctions and the intervention of federal troops. 50

Most of the newspapers of Chicago opposed the general boycott, though they were not particularly sympathetic to the imperious and very stubborn George M. Pullman. The <u>Tribune</u> and the <u>Daily News</u> interpreted this new crisis on the basis of fimiliar values — values they had developed over two decades of major industrial strife. The <u>Times</u>, on the other hand, was an altogether different newspaper from what it had been during the earlier frays. With its flamboyant proprietor dead, the <u>Times</u> had fallen on hard times in the late 1880s. The popular Democratic politician Carter Harrison I rescued it in 1891 and turned it into a factional political organ to boost his campaign for mayor in 1893.



Under the editorial direction of his son, Carter Harrison II, who later served as mayor himself, the <u>Times</u> became an insurgent Democratic organ — the only paper in Chicago in the early 1890s to whole-heartedly support the Pullman strikers. 52

As in the earlier crises, the Tribune, the Daily News, and the Times in 1894 held different views of the "labor question" and sharply different sympathies. With the Times now practically converted to populism, the Tribune of the three remained the most attuned to the philosophy of laissez-faire. The Tribune still watenly opposed strikes of any sort, and it reacted to the secondary boycott tactic of the ARU with vigor and outrage. #ter July 1, almost every news story and editorial referred to Debs as "Dictator Debs." For the Tribune, Debs became a villain second only to Governor John Peter-Altgeld, who had the year before pardoned the three surviving Haymarket anar-The Daily News was not hostile to the Pullman strike itself, though it too criticized the secondary railroad boycott. The paper declared that public sympathy lay with the strikers, and it urged the unions to call off the unpopular boycott if they hoped to win the strike at the Pullman works. 54 The Times, now shorn of all traces of Storey-style conservatism, thoroughly supported both the original Pullman strike and the secondary boycott. Throughout the struggle, the Times was the chief newspaper nemesis of Pullman and the railroad corporations and the chief enthusiast of the striking unions and the leadership of Eugene V. Debs. 55

Despite these philosophical differences, all three newspapers displayed once again basic shared values. As in 1877 and 1886, the papers in 1894 agreed that the Pullman strike/boycott was a great public issue in which the general public had a fundamental interest. This was a central editorial theme of all three. Every citizen of the United States was vitally concerned with the strike, the Tribune insisted, because the railroads were great public highways. "The



interests of the country are paramount to those involved in any merely personal dispute between the transportation companies and their employees." Both the Daily News and the Times agreed with the Tribune on the deeply public nature of the strike, and they, like the Tribune, defined the public's interest as a consumers' right. The Tribune denounced the boycott because it unfairly deprived the public of vital services, stopping the movement of vital consumer products. Though sympathetic to the original Pullman strikers, the Daily News opposed the boycott on the same grounds as the Tribune did, but for a different reason, arguing that it would cost the strikers the crucial support of public opinion. The Times also affirmed the overriding public interest in the conflict and acknowledged the inconvenience caused by the boycott, but argued that the public must be persuaded that the railroads, not the strikers, were to blame.

The firm commitment to commercial order, social peace, and social control also ran through the newspapers in 1894. Not surprisingly, the Tribune immediately demanded the suppression of the strikers the moment violence broke out. In the Tribune's view, all strikes were violent by nature, and this one was no exception. The paper applauded the federal courts for issuing injunctions against the strikers, denounced Governor Altgeld for waffling, and congratulated President Cleveland for sending in federal troops. All laws must be rigidly enforced, the paper proclaimed, all mobs suppressed by force. The Daily News also cried "Disperse the Crowds" and supported the federal government's show of force. "The workingman's best ally is the law," the paper said. "Good sense, that teaches him to see his surest path to a better state is along peaceful lines, will prove his safest guide. And the law, if not adequate to all that may be desired of it, can be made better in a lawful way." Even the Times, which desperately desired that the strike and boycoth succeed, supported almost all official efforts to enforce peace and order. In an editorial titled

"Suppress All Riots," the <u>Times</u> urged that all disorders be ended promptly, with "powder and ball and cold steel if necessary." "Law and order shall be maintained even though that most dreadful of all responsibilities — the taking of human life — be assumed by the forces of society." Though the <u>Times</u> opposed excessive police violence and argued that federal troops were unnecessary, the paper consistently supported law and order and even agreed that the court injunctions were fair and reasonable in light of the disorderly circumstances.

As in the earlier eras, the papers again attributed the violence and disorder to outsiders. The Tribune made Debs the scapegoat. It was Debs and the anarchistic leaders of the ARU that were bringing the sober, hard-working wage-earners of Chicago to ruin. The Daily News blamed "an excited minority" for the rioting — mainly the usual array of un-Americanized immigrants. In an atmosphere somewhat subdued from the Haymarket days, the Daily News suggested education rather than hanging as the proper remedy. The Times declared proudly "that no member of the American Railway union took part in this lawless foray." The outbreaks instead were the work of "sinister influences." Again, the natural state of industrial relations was peace; violent conflict was a foreign intruder into the community.

In 1894, all three paper had fully committed themselves to organizational schemes for the resolution of business-labor conflict. Despite their epposing sympathies in the strike, all three urged negotiation and mutual compromise. George Pullman, an ever-faithful son of laissez-faire who refused to negotiate or compromise, was condemned by all three papers, because he insisted on his own selfish private rights in a great public controversy. Pullman became a symbol of a dying age of private, laissez-faire labor relations. The Times branded Pullman an archaic "slave driver," who now had become a "conspirator arainst the peace and good order of the United States." The Tribune railed against his "absurd stubbornness" and derided him for ignoring the rights and

opinions at the feneral public. The <u>Daily News</u> attacked him for snubbing a labor movement that had bered to negotiate in a "spirit of fairness." The <u>Daily News</u> pronounced pulman a relic of a by-gone era, who "will not bend an inch from his attitude of stubborn self-sufficiency to avert a great public calamity."

"Arbitration" was whe watchword for all three papers, though they disagreed on who they thought would gain from arbitration in this particular conflict. "This struggle is one for the principle of arbitration," the Time's declared, and the Daily News and the Tribune agreed. When Pullman refused to arbitrate he lost the sympathy of the newspapers, and probably the public as well. The strikers' desire to arbitrate proved to the Daily News that "they are for law and forder and against anarchy and violence." The Tribune had favored arbitration for decades and pressed for the system again in the Pullman striké. their vastly different sympathies, even the Tribune and the Times in 1894 shared a basic understanding of industrial government. The Tribune advocated paternalistic company pensions and disability programs that would give employees more of a stake in the good fortunes of their companies. The Times urged that companies be forced to give labor "a broader field for the exertion of cits power." Yet, different as these proposals are, both papers expected the results to be largely, the same, for both papers believed in the common interests of labor and capital. And both expected the results to come through negotiation and compromise, through organization and bureaucracy.

Thus, it happened that in late-nineteenth-century Chicago, newspape with sharply opposing views on business-labor issues tended to exhibit similar fundamental business values — a commitment to public interest consumerism, an obsession with commercial order and social control, and a growing faith in organizational/burgaucratic modes of conflict resolution. Neither the general business culture's philosophy of laissez-faire at the macro-level (Great Forces)

nor the idiosyncracies of individual publishers and editors at the micro-level (Great Men) explains this tendency very well. The peculiar nature of the newspaper business explains it better.

III

The newspapers' commitment to public interest consumerism in business matters seems to be an obivious reflection of the papers's own throughly public nature. Though editors such as Wilbur Storey and Joseph Medill were devoted to the system of private property, private enterprise, and privatism in general, their product and the function of their product were inherently public. The whole business of a newspaper is "publication" — making information, making issues, public. As urban newspapers began to expand their definition of news and to expand their circulations to broader audiences in the mid-nineteenth century, the realm of public life expanded for them as well. Through the act of publication itself, newspapers asserted that a particular issue was no longer a private matter. There is, in fact, no private life for a newspaper. And this structural imperative of news came to dominate editorial values as well, and carried with it a subtle assault on the very private world of laissezfaire.

The modern commercial newspaper, as it evolved in the nineteenth century, was a consumer product designed for broad circulation across class, occupational, and neighborhood boundaries. Even a self-proclaimed businessman's paper such as the Chicago Tribune served an enormously diverse audience with diverse and often conflicting private interests. To sell the product, newspapers sought to understand and to broaden shared public interests. Frequently, the citizens of the new giant metropolises of America shared more as consumers of the outputs of both private business and public government than they did as producers or



wage-workers. 66 Thus, the consumer orientation was a natural one for newspapers, given the nature of their business and of their product.

As self-proclaimed custodians of the whole public's interest, newspapers not surprisingly abhorred conflict in the community. At one level, newspapers did choose sides in social conflict and on occasion secretly blessed the circulation-boosting side-effect of strikes, riots, and other upheavals. At a deeper level, however, conflict subverted the newspapers' social world, and they opposed it. One reason that the newspapers so stridently favored law and order was because they themselves were relatively small, local businesses, members in good standing of the local business community, and vulnerable to business slumps. Their revenues depended upon local business conditions, particularly the economic health of local retail merchants, their advertisers. As fundamentally local businesses, newspapers had a pragmatic interest in local order. They may have favored one side or the other in a controversy, but if the issues and interests were either abstract or non-local and the disorder was quite concrete and very local, newspapers tended to bow before the imperatives of business.

Advertising considerations, however, were not the only, or even the primary, contributor to the newspapers' commitment to social order and social control. In their efforts to do business with the whole public, or large segments of it, the newspapers were necessarily thrust into a mediator role. They were gradually becoming mass mediators, mass media. Because they sold their product broadly, they sought broad consensus. In fact, they believed that consensus was the natural order of affairs in a rational community. Though they often promoted political interest groups and factions, commercial newspapers almost always looked to the broader public. As communication media, they believed in the effacacy of communication, and they had tremendous faith in the power and righteousness of "public opinion." But to be "informed," public opinion must



be calm, rational, and deliberate — and this kind of rational public deliberation was impossible in a state of social turmoil. Violent conflict was alien to the newspapers vision of communication, consensus, and community. If conflict was alien, it is not surprising that aliens were blamed for conflict. They stood outside the rational world of discourse, especially so if they could not even read English, the sine qua non of community membership for English-language metropolitan newspapers.

Devoted to what they conceived to be the general public interest, committed at all costs to public peace and order, newspapers not unexpectedly held the resolution of conflict, by whatever means necessary; a fundamental goal.

Laissez-faire individualism on the one hand and organized labor strikes on the other hand were ideologies of conflict, and they ultimately fell before this goal -- despite the nominal editorial sympathies of the newspapers. When order is valued above all else, it is always possible to see room for compromise and negotiation, and newspapers in the late nineteenth century usually did. They viewed the unwavering, public-defying pursuit of principle, whether by a Pullman or a Debs, as reckless, socially irresponsible, and wrong. Newspapers in a sense urged the participants in controversy to follow what really was a newspaper model of conflict resolution: organize a formal communication system for the exchange of information, and compromise and consensus will follow.

Notwithstanding their widely varying editorial sympathies, Chicago newspapers by the 1890s were great proponents of arbitration in business-labor relations. Perhaps more than anything else, this faith in arbitration reflects the nature of the newspaper enterprise. To champion arbitration as something more than a stop-gap last resort, one has to believe that business-labor problems are not just pure power struggles, but are questions that can be resolved fairly through the gathering, analysis, and application of information. This faith in facts and information is the bedrock of journalism. It may be a false faith; it

probably is. But it can no more be divorced from journalism than faith in bomb and bullet can be taken from the military. It is the newspaper's <u>raison d'etre</u>. Newspapers, in fact, are themselves arbitrators in social relations — or so they conceived themselves. For these Chicago papers, then, industrial arbitration was merely the continuation of newspaper work by other means.

For newspapers such as the Chicago <u>Daily News</u>, the government could be trusted to participate more fully in the creation of social order and social welfare. For other papers, such as the Chicago <u>Tribune</u>, the lingering tug of laissez-faire greatly slowed the movement toward endorsement of active government involvement in economic and social relations. But by the 1890s, the convergence of the editorial policies of these two newspapers was already apparent, in business-labor relations and in other areas as well. By 1900, the <u>Tribune</u> had joined the <u>Daily News</u> in the promotion of government regulation of the public consequences of urban business, including the municipal ownership of public utilities. This convergence of policy was highly pragmatic, forced by the circumstances of modern urban life in the 1890s. But its roots lay deeper in the past. The underlying values that the newspapers shared by 1900 had grown up with the modern newspaper business itself in the latter decades of the nineteenth century.

IV

yond journalism history, for the values that these Chicago newspapers shared in the nineteenth century became the values of progressive-era reform and remain the values of contemporary newspaper journalism. Though the so-called progressive era of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries was a time much too variegated to characterize by a handful of social values, it is surely

commercial order and social control, and organizational conflict resolution were central to the tenor of those times. Certainly, this was the case in business-labor relations, where the essence of progressivism was the gradual working out of organizational and bureaucratic structures and relationships for the peaceful resolution (or suppression) of conflict between organized labor and organized capital. But these values also ran through other aspects of progressivism, as laissez-faire was gradually unraveled in America and replaced by the organizational/bureaucratic society and state.

The modern newspaper is in some ways the residue of progressivism. The progressives had grand plans for the newspaper. They believed in facts and information. They believed that the problems of modern life were largely information problems, problems that could be solved through the scientific selection and application of facts. John Dewey, whose latter work is the apotheosis of progressive thought, saw newspapers and other agencies of mass communication as central to the salvation of modern society, as the glue that would hold the "Great Community" together. 9 Newspapers, especially small-city newspapers, still see themselves in this role. While other institutions promote special causes, the newspaper still speaks grandly for the public interest. While other groups engage in strategic misrepresentation, the newspaper still embraces the "facts." While factions, interest groups, sects, and PAC's snivel and struggle, newspaper still seeks industrial harmony, social peace, and community consensus. While others agitate, the newspaper still arbitrates — and feels good about it.

Of course, the progressive era was famous for its optimism. Today the Great Community seems a lost and indeed a vaguely sinister dream. Today newspapers seem to be a biased, self-centered, self-important interest group like any other. All that may be true -- except the phrase "like any other." Newspapers



are not like any other. They have their own special ways of thinking and doing business, their own peculiar values. These values are neither wholly determined by the general business culture, nor are they a random accumulation of the personal values of editors and publishers. They grow, I have argued, out of the special nature of the newspaper business itself.

# # #

## NOTES

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- 12<u>Ibid.</u>, July 22, 1977, p. 6. See also July 20, 1877, p. 4; Aug. 1, 1877, p. 4.
  - <sup>13</sup><u>Ibid.</u>; July 30, 1877, p. 4.
- <sup>14</sup><u>Ibid</u>., July 25, 1877, p. 6; July 26, 1877, p. 6; July 27, 1877, p. 6; July 31, 1877, p. 4.
  - <sup>15</sup>Chicago <u>Tribune</u>, May 1, 1876, p. 7.
- The best accounts of Medill's career are Lloyd Wendt, Chicago Tribune:
  The Rise of a Great American Newspaper (Chicago: Rand McNally, 1979); and
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- 17 Tribune, Jan. 24, 1876, p. 4; March 16, 1876, p. 4; May 20, 1876, p. 4; July 7, 1876, p. 4.
- <sup>18</sup><u>Ibid</u>., July 20, 1877, p. 4. See also Feb. 4, 1876, p. 4; May 11, 1876, p. 4.
  - <sup>19</sup><u>Ibid</u>, July 25, 1877, p. 4; Aug. 2, 1877, p. 4.
- <sup>20</sup>Ibid., July 23, 1877, p. 4; July 24, 1877, p. 4; July 26, 1877, p. 4; July 27, 1877, p. 4. The outrage of the <u>Tribune</u> and the <u>Times</u> was fairly typical of other Chicago papers and papers around the nation in 1877. See, for example, Bruce, <u>1877</u>, chapter 12. On the reactions of other Chicago papers, see Foner, <u>Great Labor Uprising</u>, chapter 8.
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- 24 <u>Ibid.</u>, Jan. 18, 1876, p. 2; Jan. 25, 1876, p. 2; Feb. 26, 1876, p. 2; March 15, 1876, p. 2; March 30, 1876, p. 2; May 5, 1876, p. 2; May 8, 1876, p. 2; May 12, 1876, p. 2; July 5, 1876, p. 2; Aug. 29, 1876, p. 2; Sept. 7, 1876, p. 2.
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- <sup>27</sup>This point is developed in a broader context in Nord, "The Public Community."
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- 29 <u>Times</u>, July 31, 1877, p. 4; Aug. 3, 1877, p. 4; <u>Tribune</u>, July 21, 1877, p. 44; <u>July 30</u>, 1877, p. 4.
- 30 Times, July 31, 1877, p. 4; Tribune, July 26, 1877, p. 4; July 27, 1877, p. 4; Daily News, July 27, 1877, p. 2.
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